The Evolution of Emoticons: Web 1.0 Invention, or Communications Tradition?

By

Raquel M. Briggs

Submitted to the Faculty of Extension

University of Alberta

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Communications and Technology

June 1, 2016

"τούτου μὲν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐγὼ σοφώτερός εἰμι· κινδυνεύει μὲν γὰρ ἡμῶν οὐδέτερος οὐδὲν καλὸν κἀγαθὸν εἰδέναι, ἀλλ᾽ οὗτος μὲν οἴεταί τι εἰδέναι οὐκ εἰδώς, ἐγὼ δέ, ὥσπερ οὖν οὐκ οἶδα, οὐδὲ οἴομαι· ἔοικα γοῦν τούτου γε σμικρῷ τινι αὐτῷ τούτῳ σοφώτερος εἶναι, ὅτι ἃ μὴ οἶδα οὐδὲ οἴομαι εἰδέναι" (Σωκράτης).

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"I am wiser than this man, for neither of us appears to know anything great and good; but he fancies he knows something, although he knows nothing; whereas I, as I do not know anything, so I do not fancy I do. In this trifling particular, then, I appear to be wiser than he, because I do not fancy I know what I do not know" (Socrates).

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Abstract

Who invented the emoticon? If you Google "emoticon" and "inventor," the search engine will probably produce the same results as it did for me: a collection of varying articles, blogs, etc. naming Scott Fahlman—the year of invention: 1982. It's a "fact" fortified and propagated by a number of respected media organizations. Despite the appearance of an irrefutable consensus, the emoticon has undergone a paternity dispute to rival the most melodramatic, convoluted, and vexed daytime-talk television show. This historical analysis aims to examine and document the evolution of the emoticon—a highly contested linguistic, cultural, communications, and technological phenomenon rife with mythos. It will offer a historical review and a clear description of emoticons as a communications technology, and an analysis of the emoticon's significance for us today—an elucidation that will call forth the tradition of communication historiography. My secondary purpose, through the curation, contextualization, and comparative analysis of disparate and divergent histories—found in articles, manuscripts, magazines, blogs, books, etc.—is "to consider the development of human behavior [sic] and social experience as, in part, a response to the uses and consequences of communication media in the wider context of human history" (Crowley & Heyer, 2011, p. xiii).

Keywords: emoticons, smileys, emoji, history, Scott Fahlman, inventor, creator, communication historiography, computer-mediated communication.

Theoretical Context

Communication Historiography

What is "communication historiography"? University of Colorado at Boulder faculty,

Peter Simonson (Associate Professor of Communications), Janice Peck (Associate Professor of

Media Studies), Robert T. Craig (Professor of Communications, Fellow and Past President of the

International Communication Association, and Founding Editor of the journal *Communication*

Theory), and John P. Jackson, Jr. (Associate Professor of Communications) tell us that beyond a

simple genealogical reconstruction, an operative understanding can be found in

recognizing/identifying its province and concerns:

> Its domain includes ideas, practices and processes, institutions, materialities, and events
>
> of communicative expression, circulation, and exchange. It also concerns itself with the
>
> past study of all of those things—or, less obliquely, the history of the field of
>
> communication, its disciplinary subfields, and other sometimes articulating fields that
>
> have historically investigated communication in one form or another. (Simonson, Peck,
>
> Craig, & Jackson, Jr., 2013, p. 1)

If that explication seems rather broad and all encompassing, the field's convoluted,

overlapping, interdisciplinary nature is exasperated by its essentially nascent status.

"Communication history is at once a new field and a very old practice" (Simonson et al., 2013, p.

13). In their work "The History of Communication History" Simonson et al. remark that

> Whether we emphasize the former or the latter depends on how we define
>
> 'communication history.' On one hand, if we define it as a fully conceptualized,
>
> collectively self-aware field gathered under the sign 'communication history,' then we
>
> would have to say that it is a formation still coming into being….On the other hand, we

can conceive communication history in more spacious terms, understanding it as written,

spoken, or other mediated representations of signifying events and practices in the past.

(Simonson et al., 2013, p. 13)

In his work "Researching Electronic Media History," the *Journal of Broadcasting &*

Electronic Media Editor and communications scholar Dr. Donald G. Godfrey contends that

electronic media history is exactly like any other historical research—its purpose is the

discovery of supportable truths…historiography includes description, analysis,

interpretation, and evaluation. The researcher's challenge is in amassing a body of

organized evidence sufficient to support the reported facts and interpretation. (Godfrey,

2006, p. 5)

Methods of Historical Analysis in Electronic Media contributor and communications

scholar Dr. John Armstrong asserts that "[c]ritical, historical research cannot be defined by one

theory, nor can it be defined by one research method" (Armstrong, 2006, p. 163); moreover, he

asseverates that "critical research is not, nor should it be, the property of a particular intellectual

tradition" (Armstrong, 2006, p. 164); and that the "best kind of critical research will be driven by

rigorous collection and examination of historical evidence" (Armstrong, 2006, p. 164).

Add to that Hydra-like quality, the evolving and divergent nomenclature for even

broaching the topic of communication historiography as a discipline: it is referred to as media

history (which is an outgrowth of journalism history), electronic media history, media

archaeology, communication history, communications history, the tradition of communication

historiography (Dr. Paul Heyer, personal communication, November 5, 2015; Godfrey, 2006;

Armstrong, 2006; Simonson et al., 2013), and other derivations and combinations (Simonson et

al., 2013).

Simonson et al. report that "communication history [is] a sort of covering term that seeks to make room for a number of variably institutionalized fields of historic study" (Simonson et al., 2013, p. 1); according to Simonson et al. "communication history" (as a label) attempts to act in the "ecumenical and interdisciplinary spirit, advocating both the continued vitality of those fields and traditions on their own terms, as well as their productive dialogue with history conducted within the discipline and theoretical frameworks of the academic field of communication itself" (Simonson et al., 2013, p. 1). Furthermore, communication history as a covering term "invitationally reaches out toward the fields of media history, journalism history, the history of rhetoric and public address, and the history of the fields of communication" (Simonson et al., 2013, p. 2).

In the scholarly anthology *Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society* (sixth edition), Dr. Willard D. Rowland, Jr., Dean and Professor Emeritus of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Colorado at Boulder, provides an Orwellian solution—that would be sure to draw a smile from the faces of Strunk & White—by referring to the current generation of communication historiography practice, contained within *Communication in History*, as a "school of communication historiography" (Rowland, 2011, p. ix). This unfussy, plain language acts in the spirit of the practitioners' plight by providing terminology that adequately acknowledges the "'eclectic and interdisciplinary'" (Nerone cited in Simonson et al., 2013, p. 2) "nature of the field of communication history" (Simonson et al., 2013, p. 2): an independent discipline informed by "rhetoric, intellectual history, political economy, cultural studies, communication theory, discourse analysis, the history of science, and critical race theory" (Simonson et al., 2013, p. 3).

For these reasons, henceforward, I will take up Dr. Rowland's terminology (deploying the term "the school of communication historiography") for its unifying quality and acumen, and its astute observance that this discipline is on the cusp of something new.

Dr. Rowland reports: "The historiography of communication is undergoing [a significant and emergent transformation]. Students of contemporary media and culture are increasingly interested in the long-term environment of human experience that frames modern communication, and that interest is reshaping the study of history in the field" (Rowland, 2011, p. ix). The study of communication history has shifted from "the story of the press" (Rowland, 2011, p. ix), to "situat[ing] media history in a wider range of social institutions" (Rowland, 2011, p. ix), to a "broader story of media institutions against a much deeper chronological backdrop of the whole of human history, to examine the role of communications in the development of the human species and its forms of civilization" (Rowland, 2011, p. ix).

This research endeavours to typify this evolution of practice by observing a major tenet of Rowland's school of communication historiography:

> [Its] approach perceives all contemporary media and communication technologies as extensions of basic, innate human communication capacities. It refuses to abstract contemporary forms of media hardware and [use of] television cameras, personal computers, and satellites, seeing them instead as part of a long, complex process by which human beings are continuing to work out their particularly strong skills and instincts for creating systems of meaning and symbolic interaction. In this light, modern media technologies are only the latest, albeit highly significant, forms of ancient human communication technologies that include speech, gesture, drama, and social ritual of all kinds. (Rowland, 2011, pp. ix-x)

By telling the story of the emoticon, this research—in the tradition of communication historiography pioneers like Walter Ong, Elizabeth Eisenstein, and Harold Innis—aims to provide another example of how we have a predilection for abstracting contemporary media.

However, this enterprise is not limited to a pursuit to exemplify the school of communication historiography—or *how the alphabet is as high-tech as the latest digital gadget*.

"Historical research is often necessary to bring disparate sources together and to reconstruct a view of the past that otherwise may be lost to memory" (Merrigan, Huston, & Russell, 2012, p. 147). "One of the primary reasons to perform historical research is to understand how specific individuals, social groups, or entire societies may have thought or behaved…" (Merrigan et al., 2012, p. 146).

Moreover, Dr. Godfrey counsels that

The study of history can increase communication abilities, facilitate problem-solving skills, and instill the skills of reasoning, deduction, organizing, and analyzing evidence that is prepared in defense of a position. The challenges of historians are like those of good journalists, attorneys, or detectives who after amassing a body of evidence must organize, analyze, present, and defend a case. (Godfrey, 2006, pp. 6-7)

This unified critical approach allows research to move beyond well-worn paths (Armstrong, 2006, p. 159).

Thus, the critical tradition is honoured herein as a way to enhance the historical reconstruction. Dr. Robert T. Craig recounts

The origins of critical theory can be traced to Plato's conception of the Socratic dialectic as a method for attaining truth in the give and take of disputative interaction by asking questions that provoke critical reflection upon the contradictions that come to light in the

process. (Craig, 2007, p. 85)

"Authentic communication occurs only in a process of discursive reflection that moves towards transcendence that can never be fully and finally achieved—but the reflective process itself is progressively emancipatory" (Craig, 2007, p. 85).

"Cultural studies emphasize that media messages convey ideas from the broader culture, and that they are interpreted by audiences" (Armstrong, 2006, p. 159). Further, in his essay "Applying Critical Theory to Electronic Media," Dr. Armstrong notes that

> An important object of cultural analysis is media content…these and other objects of interpretation are referred to as 'texts.' Scholars who conduct textual analysis of media content are confident that it will yield evidence about a culture in a particular time and place. As one scholar [Brummet in *Rhetoric in Popular Culture*, p. 29] puts it, a text is the 'mouthpiece' for a culture. (Armstrong, 2006, pp. 154-155)

Here, critical theory (as a tradition) becomes critical thinking (in practical application)—as the walls between critical theory, cultural theory, and popular culture crumble to make way for a holistic view of emoticons. Dr. Armstrong points out that

> An early theorist of cultural studies was the British scholar Raymond Williams, who believed that culture should be at the forefront of social and historical analysis. Williams had a sweeping concept of culture that extended beyond works of art or expression, and included the activities of everyday life….Williams thought that culture—the way that people communicate and make sense of their world—was an overlooked factor in history. Williams also believed that scholars could conduct 'historical criticism' of intellectual and imaginative works and other evidence that would help them understand the influential meanings and values within a particular culture. (Armstrong, 2006, p. 150)

It is this interdisciplinary approach that I seek—whereby exploring the subject and evidence is more important than toeing a walled-off disciplinary line.

In a nod to Stuart Hall's advice in "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" (Hall, 2009, pp. 508-518), this research strives to take stock of the emoticon within its epoch, lest these signs fail to achieve a status as "fixed—solidified—in [their] cultural meaning and connotation[s] for ever [sic]" (Hall, 2009, p. 517)—if, like many languages, signs, and symbols before it, emoticons were to suffer a fate that would relegate them to "dead symbols and bric-à-brac" (Hall, 2009, p. 516)—mere "symbols and bits and pieces" of profound ambiguity (Hall, 2009, p. 517).

A sign "carries no guarantee of a single meaning within itself" (Hall, 2009, p. 517). Take, for example, the aubergine or eggplant: "approved as part of Unicode 6.0 in 2010" (*emojipedia*, n.d.), the now infamous eggplant emoji is being used as a phallic symbol by texters in the United States (Bromwich, 2015), turning the unspoken meaning of a seemingly harmless purple fruit into an emoticon (emoting tumescence). Although this phenomenon is currently limited to the United States, using the aubergine as an emoticon has become so prevalent, "Instagram has banned the eggplant emoji from its search algorithm, claiming that it is too often used to tag lewd photos" (Goldman, 2015). The aubergine example is not by any means anomalous.

On April 7, 2016, the world woke to multimodal, viral reports (Simpson, 2016a; Simpson, 2016b; Simpson, 2016c; Copson, 2016, Roberts, 2016, Lyne, 2016) that "we've all been using the pink woman emoji wrong" (Zatat, 2016); *The Independent* incredulously crowed:

> [The pink woman emoji is] the one we use when sassing someone on Twitter, bragging about a pay rise or when trying to justify the completely self-indulgent selfie you've just posted on Instagram. We had our minds blown recently to find out that she's not actually supposed to be sassy at all—the official Unicode name for it is 'information desk person.'

(Zatat, 2016)

On February 10, 2016, *Slate Magazine* illustrated via video "[h]ow texting emojis between different devices can turn disastrous" (Molli & Hubbard, 2016):

Unicode—the standard programming language that allows communication between platforms—is pretty much foolproof for text. Words are words, and there are no cross-platform kinks to work out. But when it comes to emoji characters, things get a bit trickier. Because of licensing issues, many messaging systems on different platforms must develop their own interpretations of the corresponding emoji symbols, so an emoji on an iPhone may appear very different on an Android. And let's just say the results…vary [sic]. (Molli & Hubbard, 2016)

The differences are so stark, and so much is lost in translation, that Molli and Hubbard warn: "we must address a problem few seem to realize: Emojis look very different on different platforms" (Molli & Hubbard, 2016). Acknowledging that "few seem to realize" this is key here.

Hence, it follows that a salient and priming, albeit somewhat digressive, point is that through Hall's lens we see just how steep-a-climb emoticons face if they are to fulfill their potential to become the dominant universal language that many of the authors/exemplars covered herein pine for. This paper realizes that individual emoticons have no fixed meaning/definition; software, platforms, digital devices, and we, as individuals, often interpret the representations incorrectly (Logan, M., 2015; Unicode Consortium, 2015); we imbue emoticons with idiosyncratic meanings, multiple meanings, and unintended meanings—"[w]e're all doing emoji wrong. Horribly, horribly wrong" (Logan, M., 2015).

The circumstances raise the question: If emoticons, and/or emoji, and/or smileys have no fixed meaning/definition, and we misuse, misinterpret, and misappropriate them, why do so

many people (like *Forbes Magazine's* Erin Griffith) want to extol the virtues of their foregone

sovereignty over alphabetic writing and language? Herein, a Socratic dialectical exchange with

the work of Dr. John H. McWhorter (a linguist and professor at Columbia University) offers

insight into our motivations.

Co-concurrently, communication history—or my favourite label the "school of

communication historiography" (for which I give primacy)—rhetoric, the critical tradition,

cultural theory, and popular culture aren't the only apparatuses present in this work. The apex of

this study is the context in which it is drafted.

MACT & Metadiscourse

An area of research identified as an important pursuit in the Master of Arts in

Communications and Technology (MACT) Program at the University of Alberta is the

study/inquiry of the social impact of communications (University of Alberta, 2012, p. 12).

Consequently, it is important that this research also seeks to invoke the art of theorizing

communication: Understanding metadiscourse—the "everyday talk about communication"

(Craig & Muller, 2007, p. x). That is to say: curating our metadiscourse about emoticons—and

fact-checking it (against itself)—to demonstrate the impact of communication technology—

reveals our penchant for abstracting contemporary media. Moreover, it is important to note that

even curating a metadiscourse is somewhat of an emergent process/discipline, and is an

exemplification of theorizing communication: "[M]etadiscourse—everyday talk about

communication—has become a major preoccupation of people in modern societies" (Craig &

Muller, 2007, p. x); it remains a "fairly new phenomenon" (Craig & Muller, 2007, p. x).

In all this, this research uses communication history, in the same way as Crowley and

Heyer's school of communication historiography (as explained by Rowland), to document and

comment on the emoticon as a popular culture phenomenon—and as a *technology*. It also draws

upon numerous MACT program readings; it is a demonstration of learning and application, and a

culminating project.

Consequently, this is "reflexive historicizing" (Craig, 2013, p. ix)—one might even apply

the literary term self-reflexive to this work—because this research is aware of itself in matter and

manner, form and content, making this work as much about the emoticon, the alphabet, and the

abstraction of contemporary media, as it is a work that answers the discipline's call "for historic

studies to be undertaken in areas of communication research" (Craig, 2013, p. ix), and "to

advance the state of scholarship in this emerging interdisciplinary subfield while also attracting

more attention to historical questions by scholars in all fields of communication research" (Craig,

2013, p. ix).

Clarifying Caveats

This research, like all communication history born of a "heterogeneous" and "'still

anarchic field,'" (Nerone cited in Simonson et al., 2013, p. 2) "can be taken as a sign of either

pluralistic creativity, overarching incoherence, or something in between" (Simonson et al., 2013,

p. 2).

I take up the first position, informed by, among others, three graduate-level scholarly

anthologies (including one endorsed by the International Communication Association) that cite

over 100 communication history scholars who have contributed to this discipline/field; these

scholars include:

From *Methods of Historical Analysis in Electronic Media*: Craig Allen, John Armstrong,

Robert K. Avery, Mary E. Beadle, Louise M. Benjamin, Marvin J. Bensman, Dale Cressman,

Donald G. Godfrey, Chuck Howell, Michael C. Keith, Tim Larson, Rebecca Ann Lind, Michael

D. Murray, Christopher H. Sterling, and Kru Ho Youm.

From *The Handbook of Communication History*: Peter Simonson, Janice Peck, Robert T. Craig, John P. Jackson, Jr., David Crowley, Paul Heyer, Jefferson D. Pooley, David W. Park, Richard Butsch, C. Jan Swearingen, Peter Burke, Michael Griffin, Christian Kaden, Ronald J. Zboray, Mary Saracino Zboray, John Nerone, Gabriele Balbi, Chritopher H. Sterling, Andreas Fickers, Benjamin Peters, Ramus Kleis Nielsen, Juraj Kittler, Joan Leach, Josef Seethaler, Nathan Godfried, Mette Mortensen, Karen Ross, Murali Balaji, Letrell D. Crittenden, Karen Lee Ashcraft, Pushkala Prasad, Susan Romano, John Sinclair, Donal P. McCracken, Ruth E. Teer-Tomaselli, Nabil Echchaibi, Gideon Kouts, Guo-Ming Chen, Akira Miyahara, Min-Sun Kim, and Lucien Sfez.

From *Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society*: Denise Schmandt-Besserat, Harold Innis, Marcia Ascher, Robert Ascher, Andrew Robinson, Eric Havelock, Robert K. Logan, Walter Ong, James Burke, Robert Ornstein, Thomas F. Carter, Lewis Mumford, Elizabeth Eisenstein, Harvey J. Graff, John B. Thompson, Tom Standage, Michael Schudson, Claude C. Fischer, James W. Carey, Rosalynd Williams, Ulrich Keller, Lisa Gitelman, Jonathan Sterne, Daniel Czitrom, Scott Eyman, Jib Fowles, Stephen Kern, John Durham Peters, Susan S. Douglas, Christopher Sterling, John M. Kittross, Michelle Hilmes, Peter Forntale, Joshua E. Mills, William Boddy, Edmund Carpenter, Lynn Spigel, Mitchell Stephens, Neil Postman, Camille Paglia, Henry Jenkins, James Beniger, Lev Manovich, Janet Abbate, David Bolter, Richard Grusin, Manuel Castells, David Crowley, Paul Heyer, and Willard D. Rowland, Jr.

Having read nearly all three of these hefty tomes (from first page to last), I take up the position that this is an erudite and efficacious discipline of considerable might; its gift for telling and testing a story with evidence is a powerful and practical communication theory apparatus. I

side with Milton Mueller: "Defining terms in a way that permits only one school or one angle of 'criticism' creates an intellectual ghetto" (cited in Armstrong, 2006, p. 164).

This perspective permits a comprehensive, critical biography of the emoticon that informs and engages the reader in critical thinking about the emoticon.

Here too, Furman University's Dr. John Armstrong acts as a cicerone:

One of the most satisfying aspects of reading history is that it is often a good story, well told. Because narrative flow is so valued in historical writing, historians often leave explicit discussions of theory out of their prose, or at least confine it to an introductory section. But make no mistake: Theory can play a crucial role in historiography.

(Armstrong, 2006, p. 146)

This research honours the narrative tradition; it carefully and methodically plays out the author's questions and criticisms about cultural studies, political economy, and medium theory within the narrative of the emoticon's biography. This is achieved via its carefully curated and wholly intentional use and side-by-side comparison of exemplars and quotes: An example can be found, herein, in the interrogation of the *Star Wars* franchise. Although there is no mention of Theodor Adorno or his seminal and highly influential text the *Culture Industry* (1991), herein the reader is led to critical thinking about the "structure, control, economics, and regulation of media industries" (Armstrong, 2006, p. 152).

Here, as you will see within, an argument for how *Star Wars* seized and controlled the very speech of Twitter users could very well be placed alongside Adorno's argument that

rigid institutionalization transforms modern mass culture into a medium of undreamed of psychological control…and the ubiquity of modern mass culture tend to make for automatized reactions and to weaken the forces of individual resistance. (Adorno, 1991,

p. 160)

After all, the words Twitter users typed, as you will read herein, were instantly transformed into corporate icons—putting corporate brands/symbols/signs in users' mouths—in place of their own written words—with little, if any, user resistance or any reported legal ramifications (as of this date).

So, too, could we say that it was Adorno who warned us "the more inarticulate and diffuse the audience of modern mass media seems to be [in the *Star Wars* example, well defined words become/became emoticons without fixed meaning], the more mass media tend to achieve their 'integration'" (Adorno, 1991, p. 163). This speaks to how *Star Wars* the corporation wielded its "ideas of conformity and conventionalism" (Adorno, 1991, p. 163): *Star Wars* paid Twitter to replace the words of individuals with corporate signs.

Perhaps another researcher would stop the story to digress and insert Dr. Noam Chomsky's (2014) bitter depiction of the dastardly and deceptive corporation—and argue how corporations are "a grave threat to humanity" (Chomsky, 2014). Another researcher might have directly applied Dr. Sut Jhally's video lecture and theory on the *Factory in the Living Room* in demonstration of how we are put to work for these corporations—how electronic media controls and shapes our identities (Jhally, n.d.). Certainly, a number of the seven major communication traditions could be applied to each piece of evidence—or all of the evidence.

However, the critical narrative—communication historiography—is given priority here, as this research seeks to create cultural transformation through the careful curation and framing of exemplars (coverage that includes the voices/work of sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, linguists, lexicographers, archaeologists, philosopher kings, economists, social science researchers, communications scholars, historians, market researchers, journalists, and

armchair critics and cynics)—in the spirit of bell hooks' (Gloria Jean Watkins) call for critical

examination of popular culture exemplars as a means to empower and educate (Jhally, 2002).

As per the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

It follows from [Max] Horkheimer's definition that a critical theory is adequate only if it

meets three criteria: it must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time.

That is, it must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to

change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable practical goals for

social transformation. (Bohman, 2005)

Like many critical theory works before it, this paper's goal is simple: "to dig beneath the

surface of social life and uncover the assumptions that keep us from a full and true understanding

of how the world works" (Haneef, Zulfiqar, Alvi, & Faisal, 2014, p. 504; Crossman, n.d.).

Furthermore, the literature review section of this project (named in compliance with

MACT document rendering protocol) is, for all intents and purposes, a biography of the

emoticon; it seeks to *show* not *tell* the story of the emoticon; moreover, in the Socratic tradition,

it does not *tell* the reader what to think; instead, it shows the reader *how* to think about

emoticons—with the ends being a means by which the reader can test her/his/hir unexamined

opinions and presuppositions about the emoticon, the alphabet, and the alleged "Digital Age."

Inasmuch, I contend that communication historiography, for all of its strengths (namely,

its fearless and unapologetic interdisciplinary approach—that could very well be likened to

cherry picking) and ostensible weaknesses (Plutarch instructs: "the correct analogy for the mind

is not a vessel that needs filling, but wood that needs igniting" [Plutarch, 1992, p. 50]), is the

ideal vehicle—the best theoretical framework—by which this research can provoke dialogue

about the emoticon.

Moreover, it ought to be noted that this research doesn't seek to disprove the Scott

Fahlman myth per se (to take away his title/claim to fame as the emoticon's inventor). Inasmuch,

its *telos* (purpose, end, or goal) is not to castigate or condemn *The New York Times*—or any

other source—for claiming emoticons are a purely digital device; illuminating

inaccurate/incomplete reporting and/or blaming contemporary media technology is not the

exercise herein. Instead, this research works in the spirit of showing that the mythos exists.

Hence, a wider frame: These are the stories *we tell ourselves* about the emoticon—or "these are

the stories we are *currently* telling about the emoticon."

Research Questions

- Who invented the emoticon?

- Are emoticons a Web 1.0 invention (by Scott Fahlman)?

- Does the current Internet mythos stand up to historical fact-checking and scholarly scrutiny?

- Do emoticons have a pre-Internet history?

- Why and how do we use emoticons?

- Are we abstracting emoticons as contemporary media?

- What are the consequences of understanding the emoticon's technological abstractions? (Emoticons are, after all, no more technical or more a modern media marvel than the codification of oral traditions: i.e., the alphabet as a technological advance.)

- What are the consequences of discovering this one history?

Why Should You Care? Collecting, reviewing, and documenting the emoticon's histories/discourses reveals conflicting interdisciplinary stories shared like the game "broken telephone." The popular culture mythos and Internet history of the emoticon is, by and large, incomplete and/or incorrect.

Methodology

Research Method

This work uses Artifact-Oriented Research as described in Rebecca B. Rubin, Alan M.

Rubin, and Linda J. Piele's *Communication Research: Strategies and Sources:*

> *artifact-oriented research* looks at communication messages and the underlying values
>
> associated with messages. Researchers classify the words or images that people use,
>
> examine the motives for creating such discourse, look at the historical and environmental
>
> factors that contribute to understanding the messages' impact at the time they were
>
> communicated, and explore the surrounding culture. Sometimes they examine archives of
>
> objects or recorded events, already collected data, or statistical results of published
>
> studies. (Rubin et al., 2005, p. 219)

Rubin et al. group these methods into two main subcategories: "archival/documentary

and textual" (Rubin et al., 2005, p. 220). This work uses a number of techniques under the parent

heading of artifact-oriented research, and the subheadings its principal types give way to. The

following outline clarifies the nesting layers of artifact-oriented research as described by Rubin

et al. (Rubin et al., 2005, pp. 220-226):

Artifact-Oriented Research

    1. Principal Type: Archival/Documentary Research

- Library/Documentary Research

- Historical Research

- Legal/Policy Research

- Secondary Data Analysis

- Meta-Analysis

2. Principal Type: Textual Research

- Critical/Cultural Approaches

- Textual Analysis

- Conversation/Interaction Analysis

- Content Analysis

Of these research methods, I will use library/documentary research—collecting and examining

all relevant published materials about [the] research topic. These include printed

materials such as published and collected documents (for example, chapters, articles,

papers, speeches) and, perhaps, media materials such as films, audiotapes, and

videotapes….[furthermore, this project will use] general sources, access tools,

periodicals, and information compilations to examine [the] research problem [and] to

answer [the] research question[s]….Of course, the Internet now connects us to many of

these sources from remote locations [thus, this work will use both physical and virtual

libraries]. (Rubin et al., 2005, p. 220)

Historical research techniques will be used herein, as this work seeks to provide a

biography of the emoticon as a "movement or idea" (Rubin et al., 2005, p. 221). Certainly, there

is no denying that this work also uses artifact-oriented research under the category of textual

research; Rubin et al. tell us: "Critical/cultural approaches involve examining events, messages,

and structures from a particular perspective" (Rubin et al., 2005, p. 222). Critical/cultural

researchers "interpret and evaluate communication events and their consequences" (Rubin et al.,

2005, p. 223) and "rely on thorough historical gathering of facts" (Rubin et al., 2005, p. 223).

Why this method? My research aims to offer historical perspective and provide a greater

understanding of emoticons as a communications technology as they exist in/on our communicative continuum.

The alternative to artifact-oriented research methods entails survey, observational, and experimental research (Rubin et al., 2005, p. 220) to look "at human behavior [sic], attitudes, and opinions rather than the text, content, or context of the message" (Rubin et al., 2005, p. 219); these alternative lenses of research would be ill-suited and even contradictory to the theoretical framework and objectives detailed herein.

Data Gathering Strategies

This qualitative systematic review uses selective/purposive sampling, key databases, with an emphasis on citation and footnote chasing, and identifying and comparing experts/SMEs (Booth, Papaioannou, & Sutton, 2012, p. 84). That is to say: The library database will act as a repository of purposive sampling and as the fact-checker for the current online media reportage that cites 1982 and credits Scott Fahlman with the emoticon's birth/invention.

I will be led by this interdisciplinary fact-checking of popular culture discourse in primary and secondary sources. I will use interview material from respected news organizations (Scott Fahlman, scholars, linguists, programmers, end-users, etc.), as well as pertinent information from Twitter studies, social media studies, content-coded studies, meta-analyses, primary archival evidence (poems, cartoons, speeches, etc.), online formal and informal media coverage (as discourse). This data gathering strategy aims to "indentify *all* the available evidence so as to reduce the effect of bias on the review findings"; this involves a "comprehensive retrieval of [exemplars/evidence]; and [sic] therefore more meaningful and credible review findings" (Booth et al., 2012, p. 71).

Pearl-growing "refers to identifying a known highly relevant article (the pearl) to isolate

terms" (Booth et al., 2012, p. 73), and in this case, to identify a leading voice/storyline in this

phenomenon. The pearl or bullseye article in this research is: Kennedy, P. (2012, November 23).

Who made that emoticon. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/25/magazine/who-made-that-emoticon.html?_r=0

    From this article the following keywords were identified and/or articulated when aligned

with the primary research concept/question, the theoretical context, and the thesis statement:

- Emoticons.

- Smileys.

- Emoji.

- History.

- Scott Fahlman.

- Inventor.

- Creator.

- Communication historiography.

- Computer-mediated communication.

These words were subsequently researched in the following ways:

- Database searching: "[S]earches in subject indexes" (Booth et. al., 2012, p. 71; p. 83);

  this includes the subject indexes of the library portal as well as EBSCO Host, JSTOR,

  and Academic Search Complete.

- Grey Literature: WWW "browsing" (Booth et al., 2012, p. 71) via Google and

  DuckDuckGo.

- Reference List Checking: that included "citation searches" (Booth et al., 2012, p. 71;

  p. 83) in article results (establishing connections, conflicts, and sources) and

"footnote chasing" (Booth et al., 2012, p. 71) in article results (establishing

connections, conflicts, and sources).

Moreover, I consulted with Dr. Mark Wolfe on the concepts and content of this paper

during its initial stages of development in September 2014. Dr. Mark Wolfe is a senior research,

strategy and communications consultant (Wolfe & Associates and the Van Horne Institute); his

consulting and expertise are wielded herein as Wolfe is a Professor at the University of Calgary

and a senior lecturer at Mount Royal University (formerly with MACT) who teaches from the

lens of communication historiography, and uses Dr. David Crowley and Dr. Paul Heyer's

scholarly anthology *Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society* as a major source

of readings. In fact, this research was inspired by Dr. Wolfe's MACT COMM 505 (LEC 800

Fa14): Using & Managing Communications Technology teaching themes of "the

[invention/innovation of the] alphabet 'free[ing] the mind' to [harness abstraction]" (Wolfe,

2013), orality and literacy, secondary orality—and the alphabet's part in the notion

> that what we consider to be fully human—coordinated social activity enabled by writing
>
> as an extension of mind/heart and voice—has been under contiguous cultural
>
> development for about 10,000 years (with precursors of it in ice age artifacts, etc.
>
> extending back tens of thousands of more years). (Wolfe, 2013)

Inasmuch, this project will follow and implement all of Booth et al.'s "[s]tages in the

literature searching process" (Booth et al., 2012, p. 71): "(a) consultation with experts in the

topic area, (b) searches in subject indexes, (c) browsing, (d) citation searches, and (e) footnote

chasing" (Booth et al., 2012, p. 71).

Although this fulfills conventional expectations of data gathering strategies, an element

of my research isn't quite as typical.

Several of the articles that I survey herein were not gathered or identified by systematic searching or serendipity; rather, they appeared to me on my Facebook newsfeed. I use Facebook not as a social media connection, but as a means in which I can access "free" subscriptions (data mining and *dataveillance* mean my subscriptions aren't really free [Schneier, 2015; Bennett, Haggerty, Lyon, & Steeves, 2014]) to a number of periodicals and organizations. Because I continually accessed and completely read all of the journal, newspaper, and magazine headlines that mentioned emoticons since September 2014, the Facebook newsfeed algorithm began providing me with a bounty of mainstream and obscure coverage of emoticons. The Facebook algorithm is designed to seek out that which the user most desires:

> The stories that show in your News Feed are influenced by your connections and activity on Facebook. This helps you to see more stories that interest you from friends you interact with the most. The number of comments and likes a post receives and what kind of story it is (ex: photo, video, status update) can also make it more likely to appear in your News Feed. (Facebook, n.d.)

Therefore, it must be stated that I am a heavy Facebook user who "follows" and "Likes" (in the Facebook sense, which holds a much deeper meaning than simply being a reader of these publications) *the New York Times, New York Magazine, the New Yorker, Slate, the Independent, the Telegraph, the Guardian, CBC News, the National Post, the Globe & Mail, the Economist, the Wall Street Journal, the Huffington Post, CNN, BBC News, Quartz, the Atlantic, Wired*, *New Scientist*, and *the Washington Post*—among many more. I also "Like" several scholarly publications, books, intellectual groups, and individual communication theorists.

The influence of Facebook's powerful and wholly accurate data culling machine cannot be overemphasized here; between September 2014 and nearly the present day (2016), the

algorithm slaved away at serving me up everything there was to offer about the emoticon. This afforded me in excess of twenty months to gradually familiarize myself with the current and relevant discourse, and process it in a meaningful way; it was an immersive experience.

Data Analysis Technique

The entire premise behind the data I analyze is reconstructing the chronology of the emoticon by curating, comparing, and contrasting the discourses/reportage—to reveal the lack of a consensus—and what data is "correct" and/or "true," and for whom.

In order to summarize and annotate key points and ideas from my collection of sources from the library, I will be "working through the papers in detail, one by one" (Booth et al., 2012, p. 133). I am able to do this without becoming overwhelmed because I have chosen purposive sampling, whereby each proof was/is "selected for a purpose" (Schutt, 2006, p. 155); in this case, I chose to collect the most salient/popular, knowledgeable, readily available, and wide range of points of view on my subject.

My method of synthesizing follows the process and practice of professional editors and peer-review boards in evaluating a manuscript as described by editing expert, Founding Editor of *Avenue Magazine*, board of directors member and Chair of Communications for LitFest Alberta, Tara Blasco-Raj. In line-by-line examination I will:

- Read critically and objectively

- Read from the audience's point of view

- Question what I am reading and will react to it

- Verify, check, and test what is said (fact-checking, as a discipline)

- Evaluate usability

- Judge the appropriateness for use and audience (Blasco-Raj, 2009)

This process will be dedicated to performing a professional editorial review on the physical copy of each proof/manuscript/book; thus, in-copy marginalia and highlights will document and illuminate crucial information, themes, concepts, and opinions. In-copy the lede, focus, nutgraph, supports/proofs (including credentials of those interviewed), and conclusions will be identified and marked-up in keeping with the Editors' Association of Canada's *Meeting Editorial Standards: Solutions and Discussions* (2000); each proof/manuscript/book will be subjected to a side-by-side editorial deconstruction.

This approach "concentrate[s] pragmatically on [the] three components of synthesis [according to Suri and Clarke, 2009]:

- Pursuing a line of argument.

- Examining consistencies.

- Identifying the disconfirming case[(s)]" (as cited in Booth et al., 2012, p. 137).

Literature Review (A Biography of the Emoticon)

Technophiliacs & Jeremiads

On February 22, 1711-12, Dr. Jonathan Swift penned an epistolary plea to "his friend, as he thought of him, the Lord Treasurer Oxford" (Swift, 1814, p. 343):

> [We] observe many gross [linguistic] improprieties, which, however authorized by practice, and grown familiar, ought to be discarded….what I have most in my heart is, that some method should be thought on for ascertaining and fixing our language for ever [sic]….For I am of the opinion, it is better a language should not be wholly perfect, than that it should be perpetually changing. (Swift, 1814, pp. 355-356)

Although Swift's "A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue" failed, it spoke to the ephemerality and obstreperous nature of a living language. English has expanded to "accommodate names for new items introduced from other geographic or cultural venues (to wit: *pineapple* and *pajamas*). Shifts occur in grammar (English lost most of its earlier inflections), spelling (*public* used to be *publick*), and pronunciation (…*mouse* was once *mys*…" (Baron, 2001, p. 95). Today, secondary orality, "[e]lectronic discourse, or oral communication that is made possible by modern technologies" (Nordquist, n.d.-a) has ushered in our latest linguistic locomotion: the emoticon.

Thesis

This historical analysis aims to examine and document the evolution of the emoticon—a highly contested linguistic, cultural, communications, and technological phenomenon rife with mythos. It will offer a historical review and a clear description of emoticons as a communications technology, and an analysis of the emoticon's significance for us today—a significance that will call forth the "school of communication historiography" (Rowland, 2011,

p. ix).

My secondary purpose, through the curation, contextualization, and comparative analysis of disparate and divergent histories—found in articles, manuscripts, magazines, blogs, books, etc.—is "to consider the development of human behavior [sic] and social experience as, in part, a response to the uses and consequences of communication media in the wider context of human history" (Crowley & Heyer, 2011, p. xiii).

The means to an end is also to reveal the unique power of communications historiography (with an emphasis on Rowland's "school" and therein its modus/modi operandi and new frontiers), and demonstrate how we have a predilection for abstracting contemporary media— emoticons are, after all, no more technical or more a modern media marvel than the codification of oral traditions: i.e., the alphabet as a technology/technological advance.

The Trouble with Columbuses

The *Random House Dictionary* defines "emoticon" as "a digital icon or a sequence of keyboard symbols that serves to represent a facial expression, as :-) for a smiling face. Emoticons are used in a digital message or text to convey the writer's emotions or clarify intent. [Also:] smiley, emoji" (*Random House Dictionary*, 2014).

The *Online Etymology Dictionary* tells us that word emoticon first appeared in English vernacular in c. 1994 from the portmanteau of "emotion + icon" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2010).

If you Google "emoticon" and "inventor," the search engine will probably produce the same results as it did for me: a collection of varying results naming Scott Fahlman.[1] One such article is *The New York Times* piece "Who Made That Emoticon?" The author, Pagan Kennedy, tells the story of how, in 1982, "a [then] young professor at Carnegie Mellon

University…realized the need for a symbol to temper the bickering that plagued online forums"
(Kennedy, 2012). To Kennedy, Scott Fahlman recounts how he hunted and pecked out what he
called a "joke marker" (Kennedy, 2012), a smiley face made with three keystrokes: a colon-
hyphen-parenthesis—to be viewed/read sideways. Kennedy's faith in Fahlman's claim to fame
never wavers, and perhaps rightly so, as Fahlman has been dubbed "the father of emoticons" by
The Huffington Post (2012), *CNN* (2007), *Gawker Magazine* (Zimmerman, 2012) and other
media giants. Thus, as far as many, perhaps even most, folks are concerned, emoticons were born
on Carnegie Mellon University's online bulletin boards at 11:44 AM on September 19, 1982
(Bignell, 2012; *The Huffington Post*, 2012; *CNN*, 2007).

Despite the appearance of a consensus, the emoticon's paternity has sparked a dispute
that rivals the most melodramatic, convoluted, and vexed daytime-talk television show.

Metadiscourse & Megadiscord

On April 14, 2014, the literary and cultural citadel *The Atlantic* announced that editor
Levi Stahl, the publicity manager for the University of Chicago Press, discovered a smiley face
in Robert Herrick's 1648 poem "To Fortune" (Madrigal). The digital image of the text read:
"Tumble me down, and I will sit/Upon my ruins, (smiling yet :)" (Madrigal, 2014).

The following day, *the Huffington Post,* citing Stahl's revelation, gushed about its hope
that "[e]moticons might not be an invention of the computer age." (Kolodny, 2014). To that end,
the *CBC* (CBC Radio, 2014), the *Business Insider* (Eadicicco, 2014), Mashable (Schroeder,
2014), Engadget (Seppala, 2014), *Dazed Digital* (Gorton, 2014), and even the tabloid tattler the
Daily Mail (Griffiths, 2014)—a popular culture powerhouse that boasts over 100 million unique
Web visitors per month (*The Economist*, 2013)—joined in the reportage. As the word spread,
and the subsequent articles made their way through various media channels (generously shared

and re-shared in/on social media via ubiquitous digital widgets), divergent experts began to pen and post their dissent.

Slate's Ben Zimmer declared the whole Stahl affair was little more than a typographical "red herring" (Zimmer, 2014). Zimmer turned to researcher Bonnie Taylor-Blake, the Early English Books Online database, and Benjamin Schmidt, a digital humanities scholar at Northeastern University, to reassure the *Slate* readership that a typographical infelicity does not a revision of communications history make.

Alan Jacobs, author and Distinguished Professor of Humanities in the Honors Program of Baylor University, agreed, blogging the following complaint in *The New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology & Society*: "I hate to be a party pooper—no, really: I hate it—but I just don't think Levi Stahl has found an emoticon in a seventeenth-century poem—nor, for that matter, that Jennifer 8. Lee [sic] found one [in a *New York Times* transcript of Abraham Lincoln's 1862 speech]" (Jacobs, 2014).

These naysayers vehemently contend that "Herrick's poem did not consistently include [a] colon-parenthesis combination in later editions" (Zimmer, 2014) and that "the parenthesis in the poem was inserted by a modern editor" (Jacobs, 2014). Jacobs explains:

> Not that parentheses weren't used in verse in Herrick's time—they were—but not as widely as we use them today and not in the same situations. Punctuation in general was unsettled in the seventeenth century—as unsettled as spelling: Shakespeare spelled his own name several different ways—and there were no generally accepted rules. Herrick was unlikely to have had consistent punctuational practices himself, and even if he did he couldn't expect either his printers or his readers to share them. (Jacobs, 2014)
>
> But, it is Jacobs's next explication where he and Zimmer disband:

I think Stahl's guess is ahistorical. The first emoticons seem to have been invented about

thirty years ago, and are clearly the artifact of the computer age, or, more specifically, a

purely digital or screen-based typewriting-only environment—because if you were

printing something out before sending it, you could just grab a pen and draw a perfectly

legible, friendly, not-rotated-90-degrees smiley, or frowney [sic], or whatever, as people

still do. Emoticons arose to address a problem that did not and does not exist in a paper-

centric world. (Jacobs, 2014)

Zimmer notes that he thinks the Lincoln semicolon-parenthesis example: "…there is no

precedent for your being here yourselves (applause and laughter ;) and I offer…" (Lee, 2009;

Zimmer, 2014) is a "slightly more plausible" (Zimmer, 2014) emoticon first, as he endorses the

position that "typographical play imitating facial expressions" conclusively appeared less than

twenty years later (Zimmer, 2014).

Keith Houston, an unusual punctuation expert and the author of *Shady Characters: The*

Secret Life of Punctuation, Symbols & Other Typographical Marks, offers a considerable amount

of pragmatic clarity on the issue: Some experts consider the Lincoln transcript a record of "the

audience's response to [his] droll introduction" (Houston, 2013, p. 234), while others point out

that the would-be-emoticon is the single and solitary incident of anything that resembles an

emoticon in a speech riddled with enough "typographical errors that it cannot be…a calculated

addition" (Houston, 2013, p. 235). Houston also notes that "without corroborating evidence"

(Houston, 2013, pp. 234-235) the Lincoln wink will never be counted as a "genuine emoticon"

(Houston, 2013, p. 235).

The contemporary, computer-mediated kerfuffle over who fathered the right-way-up

emoticon is firmly settled on the well-documented and "entirely deliberate" (Houston, 2013, p.

235) series of typographical faces that appeared in the humor magazine *Puck* in 1881 (*see* Appendix A). Houston, citing original source material, tells the story of how "…the American satirical weekly…depended on cartoonists for much of its content, and [on March 30, 1881] it carried a short article" (Houston, 2013, p. 235) that ironically pitted the letterpress department against the artists with the compositors rendering a series of "points, parenthesis, and dashes" (Houston, 2013, p. 235) emoting joy, melancholy, indifference, and astonishment, which demonstrated the "supposed artistic credentials of the magazine's…compositors" (Houston, 2013, p. 235).

Six years later, "…celebrated (and feared) [literary] critic Ambrose Bierce penned a tongue-in-cheek essay on writing reform entitled 'For Brevity and Clarity'" (Houston, 2013, p. 236). Bierce proposed a new punctuation mark called a "snigger point, or note of cachinnation" (Bierce, 1909, pp. 385-388), represented, quite literally, as a smiling mouth to be deployed as a terminal mark on "every jocular or ironical sentence" (Bierce, 1909, pp. 385-388).

There were other pre-Internet emoticons to dispel the myth of father Fahlman and Jacobs's digital-only dogma. In 1967, a Baltimore *Sunday Sun* columnist named Ralph Ruppert credited his Aunt Ev with the typographical creation of an em dash-parenthesis representing her tongue planted in her cheek, handwritten as —) (Houston, 2013, p. 237).

In 1969, the pre-Internet Vladimir Nabokov, too, thought "a special typographical sign for a smile—some sort of concave mark, a supine round bracket" (Nabokov, 1973, pp. 133-134) should exist as punctuation—for no other reason than to reply cheekily and evasively to interview questions posed by journalists (Nabokov, 1973, p. 134).

"So clearly, there has been at least a century of groundwork before Carnegie Mellon's Scott Fahlman proposed smiley and frowny emoticons in 1982" (Zimmer, 2014).

Emoticons Go Digital

When emoticons arrived in the *digitalverse*, they arrived in waves of usage. Dr. Anne

Fitzpatrick, writing for the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers' *IEEE Annals of the*

History of Computing, notes "that the early-1980s represented a transitional moment for the

Internet" (Stanton, 2014, p. 85): "[T]he users who had initially seen [the Internet] as a

collaborative work tool were increasingly seeing it as a tool for communication. As Internet

usage evolved, emoticons would play an important supplementary role to email, website, and

forum communications" (Fitzpatrick, 2003, pp. 82-83). Dr. Andrea L. Stanton of Denver

University expounds on Fitzpatrick's work, telling us:

> As emoticons continued to evolve, they seemed to overcome initial criticism that
>
> replacing verbal articulations of complex emotional states with simplistic smiles or
>
> frowns would impoverish electronic communication and cause users' writing skills to
>
> decline. In large part, this seems due to the fact that each new generation has made
>
> emoticons more visual, hiding their punctuation mark origins behind actual, pictorial
>
> images. (Stanton, 2014, p. 85)
>
> [F]irst-generation emoticons remained discrete punctuation marks, second generation
>
> emoticons tried to address this issue by converting punctuation marks into simple, linear
>
> images: ☺. Third-generation emoticons added motion—animated emoticons that moved,
>
> bounced, or made sounds as the computer translated a series of punctuation marks as
>
> animated images. (Stanton, 2014, p. 85)

But Fitzpatrick's and Stanton's work rests upon the idea that "[e]moticons developed as a

'work-around' for the exclusively textual nature of the early Internet" (Stanton, 2014, p. 84). The

history of the emoticon proves that assertion to be incorrect—or in the very least, an incomplete

summation that proliferates incorrect and incomplete presuppositions within the literature surrounding emoticons.

Stanton also suggests that a fourth-generation of emoticons have "emerged, incorporating ['sophisticated animation or even "kinetic typography" (animated text)']…with a common emphasis on personalization" (Stanton, 2014, p. 85). She also suggests that "the most recent development in the sphere of emoticons has been the [creation] of more personalized, community-specific emoticons" (Stanton, 2014, p. 85).

The purpose of Stanton's article is to document the emergent promulgation of Islamic emoticons; however, it should be duly noted that the creation and use of community-specific emoticons can be dated to the early 2000s: namely in the wildly popular—albeit short-lived— MSN Groups and forums like the Siamese Internet Cat Club (established in 1996 at meezer.org). The latter forum community boasting the "litterbox," "steaming poop," and "sparkle ball" community emoticons since c. 2003, when vbulletin and other forum software, and other technological advances took online communities from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 (Preece, Maloney-Krichmar, & Abras, 2003, pp. 1023-1027).

Stanton's 2014 research later acknowledges that textual emoticons were used by technically adept Arab-language users by "as early as 2004" (Stanton, 2014, p. 89). Stanton believes that fourth-generation emoticons can still be labeled a new currency as she contends that until now, most users—meaning the average user—did not know "how to access these emoticons or how to produce them for [themselves]" (Stanton, 2014, p. 89). It's an insightful observation and a compelling argument: highlighting the learning curve of the average user; it also serves as a testament to the power and propagation of What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get (WYSIWYG) editors (Laudon & Traver, 2013, p. 16): i.e., the average user can now access and deploy the

semiotic symbols previously reserved as the currency of "geeks" and "nerds."

Emoticons As Punctuation in the *Digitalverse*

When the Western world celebrated Punctuation Day on September 24, 2014, we witnessed how all the generations of emoticons have come together in our modern communication—much to the chagrin of many.

When Jonathan Swift called our penchant for irregular prose *improprietous*, he laid the way for *Time Magazine's* Katy Steinmetz to label our modern romps a "semiotic orgy" (Steinmetz, 2014). Steinmetz says punctuation is evolving in five ways:

1. "[Emoticons] are being wielded as punctuation. Especially on platforms like Twitter, [emoticons] are being used to [improve] understanding by providing clues to how the surrounding words should be interpreted" (Steinmetz, 2014, para. 4): for example, rather than using an exclamation point, an angry face emoticon is used.

2. "There is more freedom from conventions….Twitter and text messages have made us more apt to drop unnecessary characters—as well as less likely to make the assumption that character-dropping equals ignorance" (Steinmetz, 2014, para. 7): for example, perfect punctuation isn't expected in text messages and unconventional shorthand and/or use of acronyms like "lol" for "laughing out loud" is no longer viewed as inferior communication.

3. Steinmetz contends, "the apostrophe is losing steam in some circles" (Steinmetz, 2014, para. 9).

4. "Exclamation marks are becoming harder to avoid" (Steinmetz, 2014, para. 12). Steinmetz quotes *New York Magazine's* Melissa Dahl to encapsulate a social situation left wanting for supporting data but rich in subject-matter-expert anecdotes: "The

exclamation mark, once reserved for expressing joy and excitement, now simply

marks baseline politeness" (Steinmetz, 2014, para. 12).

5. In her fifth observation, Steinmetz blames "tricksy technology" (Steinmetz, 2014,

   para. 14) for the imminent death of the now-languishing hyphen.

It is this punctuation evolution that has our academic community's attention.

Emoticons Go Academic

The majority of our scholarly work (or perhaps our most readily accessible and

referenced work) focuses on establishing *what* we are doing when we use emoticons, as is the

case in "Emoticons in Computer-Mediated Communication: Social Motives and Social Context,"

by Daantje Derks, PhD, Arjan E. R. Bos, PhD, and Jasper von Grumbkov, PhD, that "showed

that emoticons are mostly used to express emotion, to strengthen a message, and to express

humor [sic]" (Derks et al., 2008, p. 99).

We see this *what* theme again in Joseph B. Walther and Kyle P. D'Addario's "The

Impacts of Emoticons on Message Interpretation in Computer-Mediated Communication," a

study that uncovered the "relationships between emoticons and verbal messages" (Walther &

D'Addario, 2001, p. 324).

Tyler Schnoebelen, who has a PhD in linguistics and was recently identified as an

emoticon expert by *The New York Times*, researched millions of Twitter messages looking to

identify *how* we use emoticons; Schnoebelen found that ten percent of tweets had emoticons in

them (Kennedy, 2012; Bamman, Eisenstein, & Schnoebelen, 2014).

Arvid Kappas, Professor of Psychology in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences

at Jacobs University Bremen and Nicole C. Krämer, Professor of Social Psychology, Media and

Communications at the University of Duiburg-Essen brought studies in a web of culture,

language and technology together in what is widely deemed the most comprehensive assembly

of research by major scholars in this area: *Face-to-Face Communication Over the Internet*.

In *Face-to-Face Communication Over the Internet's* chapter on emoticons, Dr. Agneta

Fischer recaps our study of how frequently we use emoticons:

Witmer and Katzman (1997) content-coded a sample of messages from publicly posted

newsgroups and special interest groups and found that 13 [sic] percent of messages

contained emoticons, or graphic accents. A similar percentage was found in an

experiment about online communication versus [face-to-face-communication] by

Adrianson (2001). Wolf (2000), however found that 30 [sic] percent of the postings on

different internet [sic] lists used emoticons, and Huffaker and Calvert (2005) found that

even half of the messages posted on weblogs [sic] by male and female youngsters

contained emoticons. (Fischer, 2011, p. 67)

Perhaps the most intriguing scholarly investigation of emoticons lies in the findings of

Hyisung C. Hwang and David Matsumoto (2013) in the context of King's Scholar Dr. Andrew

Robinson's "The Origins of Writing" (Robinson, 2011, p. 27).

In their extensively researched paper "Nonverbal Behaviors [sic] and Cross-Cultural

Communication in the New Era," featured in the scholarly anthology *Language and Intercultural

Communication in the New Era*, Hwang and Matsumoto observe:

Despite various studies concerning the functions of emoticons, only a few cross-cultural

studies concerning nonverbal cues in [computer-mediated communication (CMC)] exist,

and they mostly highlight the potential differences in meaning of emoticons across

countries (review studies of Wang 2004; Yuki, Maddux, and Masuda 2007…). Therefore,

questions regarding whether people from different cultures share the same or similar

meaning of emoticons in CMC remain….to our knowledge there is no existing research

directly comparing FTF [face-to-face] signals and CMC signs. (Hwang & Matsumoto,

2013, p. 127)

Segueing from his observations about how script, speech, and language can sometimes

unintentionally conspire to promote illiteracy, Robinson asks us: "Are the huge claims made for

the efficacy of the alphabet…misguided?" (Robinson, 2011, p. 31). He explicates:

Maybe writing and reading would work best if alphabetic scripts contained more

logograms standing for whole words, as in Chinese and Japanese writing and (less so) in

Egyptian hieroglyphs. Why is it necessarily desirable to have *sound*-based script? What,

after all, has sound got to do with the actual process of writing and reading? We have

only to look around us to see that "hieroglyphs" are striking back—beside highways, at

airports, on maps, in weather forecasts, on clothes labels, on computer screens and on

electronic goods including the keyboard of one's word processor. (Robinson, 2011, pp.

31-32)

Some people, beginning with the philosopher and mathematician [Gottfried Wilhelm

von] Leibniz in the seventeenth century…like to imagine that we can invent an entire

written language for universal communication. It would aim to be independent of any

spoken languages in the world….If music and mathematics can achieve it, so the thought

goes—why not more generally? (Robinson, 2011, p. 32)

Some would say that emoticons represent proof that we are witnessing the realization of

Robinson's dream.

In his University of South Florida public lecture "Living in an Acoustic World," Marshall

McLuhan predicted the end of phonetic writing and alphabetic literacy; he postulated that

literacy (as we know it) would be sacrificed in the struggle between the opposing forces of civilization and tribalization—rather, our re-tribalization (McLuhan, 1970). McLuhan said,

> One of the big flips that is taking place in our time is the change over from the eye to the ear. And most of us having grown up in a visual world are now suddenly confronted with the problems of living in an acoustic world, which is in effect, a world of simultaneous information. So, it's helpful to know the origins of the alphabet and of civilization and rationality in that sense, because we have come, in the twentieth century, to the end of the road. And it's a considerable revolution to have been through 2500 years of phonetic literacy only to encounter the end of the road. (McLuhan, 1970)

McLuhan explained, "One of the strange implications of the phonetic alphabet is private identity. Before literacy—before phonetic literacy—there had been no private identity; there had only been the tribal group" (McLuhan, 1970). Before the alphabet, the acoustic epics (the oral traditions of memory, story and song) acted as the "tribal encyclopedia" (McLuhan, 1970). McLuhan further contended, "if Homer [speaking as though Homer is/was the personification of oral/tribal/acoustic communication] was wiped out by literacy, literacy can be wiped out by [oral/tribal/acoustic based communication/education]" (McLuhan, 1970). McLuhan claimed that we are currently playing this Homeric and acoustic communication story backwards (McLuhan, 1970)—abandoning literacy/phonetic writing for re-tribalization. Our behaviour and technological advancements since 1970 seems to have proved McLuhan a proficient prognosticator.

Of the world's seven billion people, six billion have mobile-cellular phones (International Telecommunications Union, 2012, p. 1), and it appears foregone that each of these users has—in varying degrees—taken part in the unavoidable viewing, sending, and/or receiving of emoticons,

smileys, emoji, and/or cyberspeak acronyms (e.g., LOLZ, etc.) via texting, instant messaging, and applications—as it is inherent to the function/purpose of the device (Jones, 2012). Moreover, whether by mobile/cellular, tablet, laptop, or desktop, the Internet certainly creates a situation conducive to re-tribalization—a single culture—3,270,490,584 Internet users (Internet World Stats, 2015); 1.49 billion monthly active, and 968 million daily active Facebook users (Smith, 2015) makes for a virtual, borderless world—a modern Tower of Babel where a universal language is imperative.

If we adopt the positions of Robinson, Leibniz, and McLuhan, it would appear that the intersection between emoticons and McLuhan's "Homeric to acoustic world" is the place marker ahead as the world moves closer to a "wordless tongue" (Sternbergh, 2014)—or so say the technophiliacs. But what of the jeremiads?

Dr. John H. McWhorter, a linguist, Professor at Columbia University, and author of *The Language Hoax* tells us:

> Few illusions are harder to shed than the idea that only writing makes something "a language." Consider that Yiddish is often described as a "dying" language at a time when hundreds of thousands of people are living and raising children in it—just not writing it much—every day in the U.S. and Israel. (McWhorter, 2015)

On Calculated Conjecture & the Context of the Continuum

Dr. McWhorter reports that it "isn't an accident that the Bible's tale of the Tower of Babel presents multilingualism as a divine curse meant to hinder our understanding" (McWhorter, 2015). We have long suffered the longing for a universal language.

If we honour the most basic tenets of the school of communication historiography, and therein inquire about context, we learn Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz wasn't alone: McWhorter

avers that history is littered with failed attempts to create a universal language:

> In 1880 a Bavarian priest [Johann Martin Schleyer] created a language that he hoped the whole world could use. He mixed words from French, German and English and gave his creation the name Volapük, which didn't do it any favors. Worse, Volapük was hard to use, sprinkled with odd sounds and case endings like Latin. (McWhorter, 2015)

> Then in 1887, Ludwik Lejzer Zamenhof crafted Esperanto, "which had a lyrical name

and was much easier to master…but it didn't matter. By the time Esperanto got out of the gate, another language was already emerging as an international medium: English" (McWhorter, 2015). Placing English in this context—next to its counterparts on the communications continuum—dulls the sheen on the idea of what is high tech, new, and revolutionary.

Media, Technology, and Society (2000) author and renowned British media scholar Dr. Brian Winston, contends that no communications revolution is afoot:

> Historical consciousness reveals the 'Information Revolution' [and the 'Digital Age' (to take another hyperbolic slogan)] to be largely an illusion, a rhetorical gambit and an expression of technological ignorance. The popular literature on these matters and the media resound with visions of technoglory or apocalypse, the same set of phenomena being the source for both styles of pontificating. Curiously, more than a few supposedly scholarly works, again both the technophiliac as well as the jeremiads, exhibit the same traits—fervid but purblind imagination, unbalanced judgements and undimensional insights. (Winston, 2000, p. 2)

> According to Winston, "new media, from the telephone to computers, satellite,

camcorders and CD-ROM, is the product of a constant play-off between social necessity and suppression" (Winston, 2000, Preface).

In 1987, historian George Wise said of Winston's book *Misunderstanding Media* and the theory therein:

Winston tells us, innovation always follows a sequence of predictable phases, driven by two laws. "The law of supervening [social] necessity" states that social readiness, not technological readiness, determines the pace of innovation. One expects [the second law] "the law of the suppression of radical potential" to tell of a capitalist plot to suppress technology-for-the-people but gets instead the unsurprising news that established interests try to envelop and control challenging new technologies. Sometimes they succeed. The radio networks dominated television…Sometimes they fail. Western Union did not dominate telephony. (Wise, 1987, p. 491)

Wise goes on to say that Winston's model-based analyses and theories are far less important than the general conclusions Winston draws, and how those generalizations impact history and historical work (Wise, 1987, p. 491). Wise says, "a message well worth receiving burns through the [information deluge and theoretical] fog" (Wise, 1987, p. 491):

Today's new information technologies (personal computers, cable television, communications satellites, fiber optics, [etc.]), like yesterday's (telegraphs, telephones, radio, television), do not appear overnight and then radically transform society. Instead they appear after plenty of advance warning, emerge when a society is ready for them, and then accommodate themselves to existing institutions. (Wise, 1987, p. 491)

In Wise's assessment, another worthy conclusion is that "conventional stories of the evolution of information focus too narrowly on a single inventive moment" (Wise, 1987, p. 491): noting that Winston says that this ought to be corrected with "the study of the prehistory and post-history of inventions" (Wise, 1987, p. 491).

For Dr. Winston, "informed historical vision creates a more balanced picture of [a technological advancement's] true size and scope" (Winston, 2000, p. 13): ideas are produced, inventions are produced, but "any new communications technology takes decades to be diffused" (Winston, 2000, p. 13); moreover, ideas and inventions can be rejected or accepted (Winston, 2000, p. 7) depending on their efficacy, and the generalized social, societal, technological, economic (etc.) forces at work at the time (Winston, 2000, p. 6).

"The fax was introduced in 1847. The idea of television was patented in 1884. Digitalization was demonstrated in 1938. Even the concept of the 'web' dates back to 1945" (Winston, 2000, Preface). Hieroglyphics date back to 3100-3000 B.C.; pictographic communication dates back to the Ice Ages: after 25,000 B.C. (Robinson, 2011, p. 32).

Following Winston's lead means seeing emoticons as a "failed" technology of the Ice Ages—not a Digital Age darling that will usher in the death of phonetic or alphabetic writing: the measure of success or failure here being that history tells us that pictograms did not outpace or replace the spoken word, orality, or phonetic or alphabetic writing for post-Ice-Ages humans—at least not yet. Is it still diffusing?

Fortune Magazine's Erin Griffith boldly and definitively declared that we are now living in a hieroglyphic world (Griffith, 2014). On the heels of an announcement that "a new [business class] of emoji [was] set to be released [in July 2014] by the mysterious consortium that dreams them up," Griffith told her readership: "Influential bloggers say we're in a 'post-text world,' [and those] influential bloggers [have all the same cultural power as] Oprah [Winfrey]"; Griffith goes on to say that *selfies* and *dronies* are now an integral part of our modern communication, but the "most important" communication tool is the emoji/text emoting (Griffith, 2014). Griffith explains that "emoji art exhibits, emoji poetry books, emoji social networks, and, thanks to Katy

Perry, emoji music videos [and even a full translation of Melville's classic novel, re-titled *Emoji Dick*]" means that the visual vocabulary of emoticons is more important and popular than ever (Griffith, 2014). But is it?

On November 16, 2015, Oxford Dictionaries announced via its blog that "for the first time ever, the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year is a pictograph [a graphic that cannot be reproduced in basic Word processing]":

> officially called the 'Face with Tears of Joy' emoji, though you may know it by other names. There were other strong contenders from a range of fields, outlined below, but [the 'Face with Tears of Joy' emoji] was chosen as the 'word' that best reflected the ethos, mood, and preoccupations of 2015. (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015)

> At the same time Oxford Tweeted:
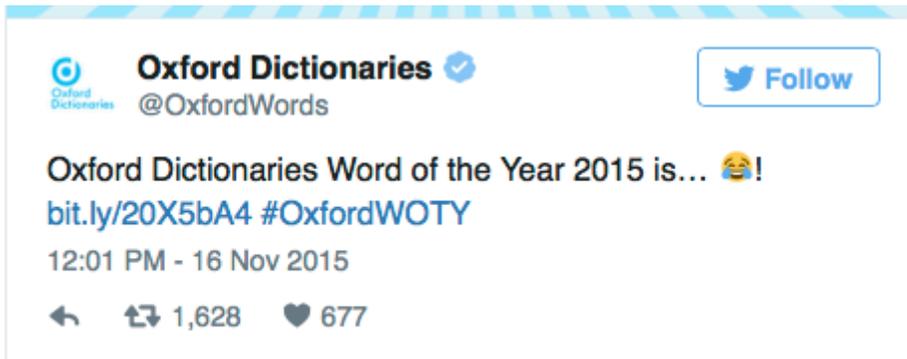
As the re-tweets swelled and the news spread, with reports from *BBC*, *CBC*, *the National Post*, *the Guardian*, *the Globe and Mail*, *The Washington Post*, and other national and international news organizations, a pattern emerged. The articles and/or their public feedback mechanisms were dominated by the criticism that an emoji isn't a word (*BBC Newsbeat*, n.d.; Bowman, 2015; Tucker, 2015; Parkinson, 2015; McGinn, 2015; Wang, Y., 2015). The resulting crescendo prompted the following exchange on the Oxford Dictionaries Twitter account:
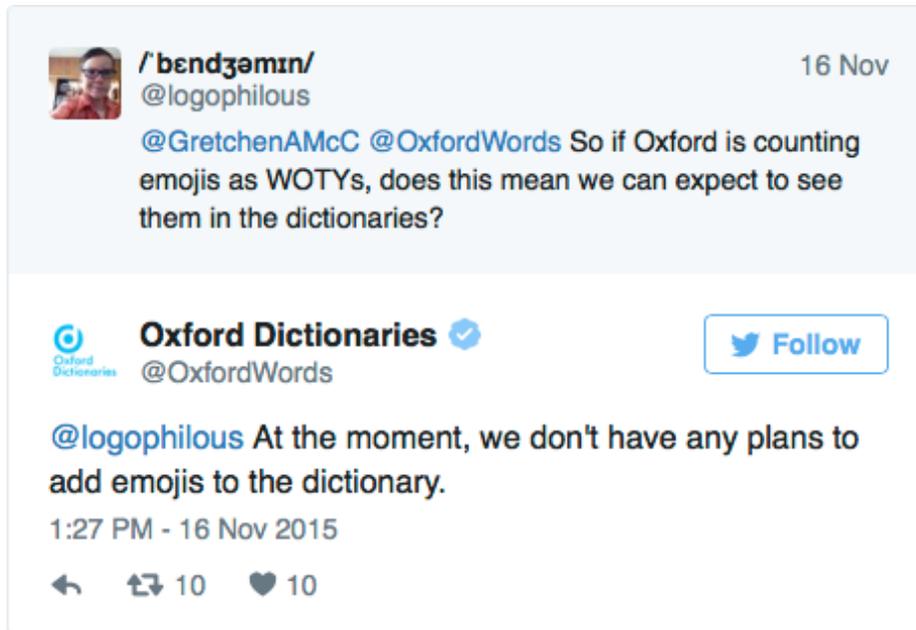
John Bowman's *CBC* article "Oxford Dictionaries Selects 'Tears of Joy' Emoji as 'Word' of the Year" became a vitriolic review of Oxford's announcement and choice: the article reported on the backlash from various Twitter accounts (e.g., Comedy Central, etc.), while the article's feedback forum was used by the public to mock Oxford, and call its reputation into question (Bowman, 2015). Unforgivingly, user Scott Deveau, cleverly quipped that the folks at Oxford ought to look up the meaning of "word" in the dictionary (Bowman, 2015). And the hyperbolic, volcaniclastic flow continued.

The Globe and Mail's Dave McGinn said Oxford's announcement should provoke embarrassment—and "no-hope-for-humanity emojis," and that the response could be summed up as "confused emoji, mocking laughter emoji, pile-of-poop emoji" (McGinn, 2015).

If being called excrement wasn't enough, users/subscribers of *the Washington Post* reacted by calling the choice "idiotic," "stupid"—and demanded that Oxford retract its decision (Wang, Y., 2015).

In 2010, *The Telegraph* announced, "The next edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, the world's most definitive work on the language, will never be printed because of the impact of the internet [sic] on book sales" (Jamieson, 2010). The article notes: "Despite its worldwide reputation, the [*Oxford English Dictionary*] has never made a profit," but that the company was holding out hope for future demand in the coming decade (Jamieson, 2010). In choosing a word of the year that wasn't/isn't a word but an emoji, and admitting that it would never appear in the dictionary, Oxford's spin-doctor stunt seems to have snuffed out that hope; despite Oxford's fanfare, including posting a photo of a "Face with Tears of Joy" emoji celebratory cake, the debacle is destined to be remembered as "the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year that wasn't."

Oxford Dictionaries—of venerable Oxford University Press fame—isn't the only company that is guilty of trying to drive the cultural and linguistic sovereignty of the emoticon.

On June 24, 2015 the American carmaker Chevrolet issued a press release written entirely in emoji. "The incoherent press release caused many to cringe from secondhand embarrassment" (Wang, 2015). According to *Slate Magazine's* Amy X. Wang, the attempt to be "cool" was a complete disaster, and was universally panned by the "news outlets [that] flew into a tizzy trying to analyze [it]," (Wang, 2015) prompting her to point to *Car & Driver Magazine's* Robert Sorokanich, who provided what Wang called "the most amusing [of all the journalistic] stabs" (Wang, 2015). Sorokanich "translated" the press release and mocked Chevy and its failed attempt to connect with a young audience; his readership agreed and chimed in on the *Car & Driver* forum, guffawing over how Chevy was trying way too hard, and that the press release was incoherent to millennials: the age group for which emoticons are purported to be the preferred method of digital communication (Sorokanich, 2015). And there have been other corporate blunders.

On October 20, 2015, *Future Tense* (a technology and culture column forged in

partnership of *Slate Magazine*, *New America*, and Arizona State University) reported on how

Twitter was appending user hashtags to custom corporate emoji—without the user's permission

(Brogan, 2015). It wasn't the first time Twitter experimented with custom corporate emoji;

Twitter, Disney, and Lucasfilm were looking for ways to cash in on the conversation and fan

culture surrounding *Stars Wars: The Force Awakens* (Brogan, 2015). As a fan—who watched

with surprise as his own words were transformed into merchandise icons—Brogan called the

exploitation of his tweets "invasive," "crass," "an overt intrusion," and an

"unambiguously…manufactured and manipulated" conversation (Brogan, 2015). Brogan

admitted that he felt disquieted by the "ease with which [Twitter] inserted corporate messaging

into fan commentary," (Brogan, 2015) and that he was concerned about how corporate emoji

could control and influence what users could/would say (Brogan, 2015).

The Oxford, Chevy and Twitter-Disney-Lucasfilm backlash stories aren't the only

examples of emoticon eschewal.

For the world's almost 1.4 billion Chinese (United Nations, 2015), the latest craze isn't

the emoticon. *Quartz Magazine's* Josh Horowitz rejoices: "Stop texting right now and learn from

the Chinese: there's a better way to message" (Horowitz, 2015). According to Horowitz

> Voice messaging—or sending short audio clips instead of text messages—has taken
>
> China by storm. Step on a Beijing subway and you'll see people barking into their phones
>
> intermittently, as if they're using walkie-talkies. On WeChat, the popular Chinese
>
> messaging app with over 500 million monthly users, the average chat window looks
>
> something like [a bar graph of digital wave forms]. (Horowitz, 2015)
>
> It's the ultimate snub of the smartphone as a superpower: for all its digital gadgetry—and

despite the fact that "Apple and Google made emojis standard on IOS and Android smartphone keyboards" (Kalb, 2015)—the smartphone has been relegated to the work of a mere walkie-talkie, the two-way radio of World War II fame.

Our futuristic devices often reach for the past—not the future. "*Star Trek* was more than just a television show. It inspired a generation of scientists and inventors to bring to our lives the technological innovations that were on screen [in the late 1960s]" (Mortillaro, 2013).

When Captain Kirk was on an away mission and needed to communicate with the Enterprise, he'd whip out his handy device and, with a flick of the wrist, open up his communicator. The inventor of the mobile phone, Martin Cooper, has admitted he was inspired by [*Star Trek's*] Captain Kirk [and his communicator]. (Mortillaro, 2013)

The walkie-talkie begat the *Star Trek* communicator; the communicator begat the smartphone; the smartphone reverted to being a walkie-talkie.

These modern examples of the push back—or *suppression*—of emoticons as our primary communications apparatus, coupled with our storied historic rejection of them as a universal language, support Winston's claim that modern media *is* always and *has* always been modern media—and it's always high tech; the emoticon has been in technological development and in widespread use for tens of thousands of years.

The "Emoticon" & Alphabetic Interchange: Technologies We Don't Consider Technologies

"From all available evidence, the evolution of writing is a continuation of the image representations found in prehistoric art, especially in the [clay] tokens used to count objects, track time, or indicate ownership" (Moran, 2010, p. 90).

In her "The Earliest Precursor of Writing," Walter J. Ong Award winner, archeologist, and Professor Denise Schmandt-Besserat "provides compelling evidence for her contention that

before the emergence of writing, several Old World societies were recording economic

transactions through the use of fired clay tokens….” (Crowley & Heyer, 2011, p. 2).

> [Schmandt-Besserat’s] fascinating detective work…[challenges the] traditional
>
> interpretations of these artifacts as charms, toys, or tools….she notes that many of the
>
> tokens resemble the characters known as ideograms, which are conventionalized signs
>
> that do not look like what they represent (a character that looks like what it represents
>
> is…a pictogram). Ideograms were the basis of the world’s first full-fledged writing
>
> system, the Sumerian, which arose in 3500 B.C. Thus if one accepts her hypothesis, the
>
> tokens were an abstract form of three-dimensional writing in response to social and
>
> economic changes necessitating a more complex way of life: civilization. (Crowley &
>
> Heyer, 2011, p. 3)

In his book *Introduction to the History of Communication: Evolutions & Revolutions*,

Terence P. Moran, Professor of Media Ecology in the department of Media, Culture, and

Communication at New York University, tells us that,

> While a full system of writing seems to have come earliest in Southern Mesopotamia
>
> around 3100 B.C.E, other places have claims for developing full writing systems. Egypt,
>
> the Indus Valley, and China and Mesoamerica are all contenders. But the evolution of
>
> writing that led to the alphabet can be traced to the Middle East. Beginning with the
>
> Sumerians and the Egyptians, early writing systems began to incorporate phonetic
>
> principles into their signs, most likely to distinguish between signs with more than one
>
> possible meaning (as we do with spelling their, there, and they’re differently to signify
>
> the different meanings of the same sounds). (Moran, 2010, pp. 90-91)

Dr. Moran’s speculations call Dr. Winston’s theory of *supervening social necessities* to

mind—whereby "a concentration of…generalized [societal and social] forces coalesce to function as a transforming agency" (Winston, 2000, p. 6)—as it provides the intellectual process by which we can account for and imagine the social circumstances that acted as the impetus for our communication and technological evolutions and revolutions.

"Whatever the motivation, it was a group of West Semites, living in what is today's Israel, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria, who most likely used the phonetic principle found in cuneiform and/or hieratics [writing consisting of abridged forms of hieroglyphics[2]] to shape a new writing system. These Canaanites were essentially middlemen trading in [a multi-empire] nexus…(Moran, 2010, p. 91) who "…needed a script that was easy to learn, quick to write and unambiguous" (Robinson, 1995, p. 161). "[I]n places like Egypt and Babylonia, writing developed an auditory dimension. For example, a picture in hieroglyphics, or a cuneiform character, came to indicate not the object represented, but the sound (usually the main syllable) uttered when the object was spoken" (Crowley & Heyer, 2011, p. 36). "Although [these] alphabetic representations existed in both Akkadian cuneiform and Egyptian hieratics, neither culture developed them into a free-standing systems of writing" (Moran, 2010, p. 91). The use of these "sound signs" or phonograms to transcribe myths and histories was limited to "an elite group of…scribes" (Crowley & Heyer, 2011, p. 36). The rest of society counted on orality: "The use of speech, rather than writing, as a means of communication" (Nordquist, n.d.-b). "[T]he tools of literacy [remained] unfamiliar to the majority of the population" (Nordquist, n.d.-b).

"The next major players in this evolution of writing from pictograms to full alphabet were the…Phoenicians" (Moran, 2010, p. 91). The "Phoenician alphabet contained 22 [sic] signs (letters) to denote consonant sounds, but there were no signs for vowels…" (Moran, 2010, p. 91).

In their interactions with the Phoenicians…the Greeks, some time between 1000 and 800

B.C.E, began to use and adapt the Phoenician alphabet. Early Phoenician writing was not

fixed in one direction, right to left, until about 1050 B.C.E and Greek writing was itself

unstable, moving from right to left, left to right, or in alternating lines between the two in

a style called 'boustrophedon' (as the ox plows)…The Phoenician signs were adapted by

the Greeks to represent both consonants and vowels in a 23-sign [sic] system: alpha (now

a full vowel), beta, gamma, delta, epsilon, zeta, eta, theta, iota, kappa, lambda, mu, nu,

xin, omicron, pi, rho, sigma, upsilon, phi, chi, psi, and omega. (Moran, 2000, pp. 91-92)

Moreover, while Moran hesitates to speculate on the Greek "motivations for adopting and

adapting the Phoenician alphabet" (Moran, 2000, p. 92), Crowley and Heyer tell us that as "[our]

world became increasingly complex, [we] needed more than just [a] shared memory of [a] group

to recall important things…[we] needed what is…called …extrasomatic memory, a memory

outside the body" (Crowley & Heyer, 2011, p. 2). A view shared by Robinson, who informs us

that the scholarly consensus is that when it comes to writing, people in the late fourth millennium

were driven by "…the complexity of trade and administration…[as it] reached a point [where] it

outstripped the power of memory of the governing élite" (Robinson, 2011, p. 29). Inasmuch, we

can return to Winston and apply his theory of *supervening social necessities*—whereby "a

concentration of…generalized [societal and social] forces coalesce [and] function as a

transforming [catalyst for innovation and invention]" (Winston, 2000, p. 6). Dr. Moran says,

The Greek alphabet gave the Greeks a way to [go 'beyond mere recordkeeping' to]

extend their epic poetry….it allowed Plato to quote (or misquote) Socrates, Plato to move

from dialogue to essay in *The Republic*, Aristotle to analyze everything from poetry,

drama, and rhetoric to biology and politics…to create history as an art form…to create

tragedies that touch us today, and countless early scientists and scholars to probe the

mysteries of life and death, of the earth and the universe. (Moran, 2010, p. 93)

Eric Havelock, a professor at Yale University who wrote "extensively on the impact of literacy…especially with reference to the legacy of Greek alphabetization" (Crowley & Heyer, p. 38) said that "[t]he Greeks did not just invent an alphabet; they invented literacy and the literate basis of modern thought" (Havelock, 1982, p. 82).

"A revolution was underway both psychological and epistemological" (Havelock, 1982, p. 87).

"[T]he full theoretic possibilities that would accrue from the use of the Greek alphabet…in order to place the invention in its proper historical perspective" (Havelock, 1982, p. 83), can be found in the co-authorship of Marshall McLuhan and Robert K. Logan. In 1977, McLuhan and Logan credited "…the use of phonetic writing systems [for] creat[ing] an environment conducive to the development of codified law, monotheism, abstract science, deductive logic, objective history, and individualism" (Logan, 2011, p. 45).

Because alphabetic writing "encouraged classification and codification of information…and provided a natural way of ordering verbal information" (Logan, 2011, p. 45), the technology was adopted by and adapted to many languages—starting with the Roman alphabet English speakers use today. Dr. Logan muses:

> It is interesting to note that the order of the letters of the alphabet never changed despite the fact that it was passed from one culture to another and adopted by so many different languages. The names and shapes of the letters changed but not the order of their presentation when the alphabet is recited as 'abcdef.' (Logan, 2011, p. 45)

While the dawn of the alphabet as a communication technology clearly had its advantages—and as evidenced by its proliferation—its share of technophiliacs—it also had its

jeremiads.

> Most persons are surprised, and many distressed, to learn that essentially the same
>
> objections commonly urged today against computers were urged by Plato in the *Phaedrus*
>
> (274-7) and in the Seventh Letter against writing. Writing, Plato has Socrates say in the
>
> *Phaedrus*, is inhuman, pretending to establish outside the mind what in reality can be
>
> only in the mind. It is a manufactured product. (Ong, 2002, p. 78)

Understanding the oral tradition—that was sacrosanct to Socrates—says the Reverend

Father, former president of the Modern Language Association of America, and orality expert, Dr.

Walter Jackson Ong "is a necessary starting point for grasping the subsequent impact of writing

and print, a view shared by many [communication historiography scholars]" (Crowley & Heyer,

2011, p. 37).

"The past century has seen the world enter into a new stage beyond orality and script and

print, a stage characterized by the use of electronics for verbal communication" (Ong, 1967, p.

87)—a stage Ong calls *secondary orality*:

> The contrast between oratory in the past and in today's world well highlights the contrast
>
> between primary and secondary orality. Radio and television have brought major political
>
> figures as public speakers to a larger audience than was ever possible before modern
>
> electronic developments. Thus in a sense orality has come into its own more than ever
>
> before. But it is not the old orality. The old-style oratory coming from primary orality is
>
> gone forever. (Ong, 2011, p. 55)

Although the great gadfly would be aghast, all is not lost. Surely, Socrates would be

elated to see a world where the sophist and scribe no longer control literacy—a world where

edification usurps the despotism that forced him to imbibe hemlock (Plato, 2009, pp. 648-669); a

world that—for the most part—aspires to remove privilege (Parker, 2008; Kennedy, E., 2014; Bailey, 2009; Smith, S., 2005) as a barrier to literacy:

> The modern world is based upon the messages and the message systems made possible by literacy. All of what we call arts, education, the humanities, the sciences, and the social sciences are predicated upon literacy. Without literacy and the messages it allows us to share over time and space, there would be no schools as we know them today. Our very definitions of information, intelligence, and knowledge would be quite different without literacy. Writing, especially alphabetic writing, helps to free all humans from the tyranny of the now and here of any culture. (Moran, 2010, p. 94)

We can only imagine how difficult it must have been for pre-writing people to grapple with learning and using the alphabet:

> a primary oral culture, where the word has its existence only in sound, with no reference whatsoever to any visually perceivable text and no awareness of even a possibility of such a text, the phenomenology of sound enters deeply in human beings' feel for existence, as processed by spoken word. (Ong, 2011, p. 54)

Today, with the advent of secondary orality, a word without a link to text—to an alphabet born of the Greeks—seems inconceivable.

In the alphabetic *theogony* we see the concepts and precepts of communication study stripped bare: electronic culture, as an entity, is no more a profoundly anomalous evolutionary progression than the codification that frightened Socrates—or the revolutionary prehistoric symbolic systems of the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods in history.

Perspectival Shift: Bursting the Bubble of Chronological Snobbery

Dr. Mark Allen Wolfe, a University of Calgary communications professor and Senior

Lecturer at Mount Royal University intimates:

> One impressive and rather humbling thought/theme that's embedded in [examining phenomena through the School of Communication Historiography lens] is that what we consider to be fully human—coordinated social activity enabled by writing as an extension of mind/heart and voice—has been under contiguous cultural development for about 10,000 years…the cultural implications of this revelation [requires study and discussion]. [This lens forces us to ask:] how do we impress upon the iPod/Pad/Facebook generation that what they glorify as radically new and tech savvy has a precursor in bullae (neolithic PDAs?) that ancient Sumerians were carrying around thousands of years before Christ? (Wolfe, 2013)

The answer lies in illuminating the complex "relationship between human history and communication history" (Pearson, n.d.).

Our understanding—generational heir presumptive included—of communications, cultural theory, and popular culture is subject to intergenerational "omissions, distortions and reinterpretations" (Williams, 2009, p. 38). As generations and epochs interchange, like runners in a rally, we are subject to "selective tradition" (Williams, 2009, p. 39); this inheritance—that of lived culture, recorded culture, and selective tradition (Williams, 2009, p. 37)—shapes our perception and sense of identity. Furthermore, the acclaimed Welsh academic, novelist, and political, culture, mass media, and literature critic Raymond Williams tells us that "[w]e tend to underestimate the extent to which the cultural tradition is not only a selection but also an interpretation" (Williams, 2009, p. 39).

Winston says much the same by proposing that communication is a continuum and that our *technologies* have a cyclical process and lifecycle. Winston quotes Walter Bendix Schönflies

Benjamin's analysis of the artwork of Paul Klee to illuminate historicism—technological

innovation, diffusion, and suppression—and the information revolution and Digital Age as

hyperbole:

> A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about
>
> to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his
>
> mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His
>
> face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single
>
> catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.
>
> The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed.
>
> But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence
>
> that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future
>
> to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This
>
> storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin, 1969, pp. 257-258; Winston, 2000, p. 1)

Our storm of progress is an event of consistent intensity. "Repetitions can be seen across

[our] diverse range of technologies and across the…centuries of their development and

diffusion" (Winston, 2000, p. 2).

Williams, I imagine, would heartily agree with Winston: as "social beings, [we are]

exponents of and prisoners of the culture that produces [our understanding]" (Winston, 2000, p.

5) of communication, history, and the sociohistorical context of our technology. "The whole

human experience, therefore, seems to depend greatly upon the form and forms of

communication that are most in ascendency during any era" (Rowland, 2011, p. x).

Our communication is ephemeral and continuously and congruently "revolutionary" by

its very nature. Its reputation is in a constant state of hyperbole because we see our personal,

generational-specific diffusion as unprecedented progress. Sociohistorical context reveals "the information revolution as hyperbole" (Winston, 2000, p. 1), as we exist—and communicate—on a continuum of innovation, diffusion, and suppression.

If this generation is like every generation before it, answering the *how* in Dr. Wolfe's question is in a combination of formal education and the legacy of selective tradition. Whether we are notching bones, as we did in Lower and Middle Paleolithic times (Schmandt-Besserat, 2011, p. 6)—a practice we believe to be the "first communications medium" (Crowley & Heyer, 2011, p. 2)—to clay tokens, to cuneiforms and hieroglyphs, to our oral traditions, and the invention of the alphabet—communication and communications are our "tools for thought" (Crowley & Heyer, 2011, p. 2). In all cases, we have continually self-glorified our generation-specific communicative currency, and I expect we will continue to do so.

Williams said, "We create our world as we have thought of art being created" (Williams, 1961, p. 259). "Angelus Novus" is an expression of our proclivity to privilege our art, our painting, and our storm over all others.

Conclusion

A Stitch in Time

This historical analysis stands as a place marker on our communications continuum. Herein, I have demonstrated that our present stratum of scholarly work on emoticons examines them as punctuation (they are integrated mechanics), or as a phenomenon that brings emotion to the emotionless (they are new appendages: although many people, including yours truly, would argue that conventional punctuation was doing just fine on its own), or as a means in/by which people can strengthen social ties via community-specific icons/memes (community-specific artifacts/currency acting as an independent agent of conventional language). Separately and collectively, however, these academic perspectives don't represent the whole story—a story more akin to the Wheel of Saṃsāra than a tidy tale with a definitive beginning, middle, and end (replete with hero inventors and heroic inventions).

Despite Jonathan Swift's call for a final, immoveable, stationary language, the historiography and analysis of the emoticon demonstrates how and why our communicative chronicle is continually being written and rewritten.

This research bears out that although there is a lack of scholarly evidence to support a case for our language outmoded, it is possible that we are in the throes of a major communications evolution.

Through the proliferation of the Internet and the globalization of our economies and communications (especially via social media: where billions of diverse ethnic and linguistically tooled people interact everyday [EMarketer, 2013]), we may, in organic response to *supervening social necessity*—be taking English—already primed by a penchant for adopting the words, practices, and principles of the world's languages (Baron, 2001)—to its next evolutionary level.

However, this research demonstrates that this must be qualified with/by the knowledge that we

have been here before—with what we now call the emoticon: Hieroglyphics, pictograms,

ideograms, logograms, signs, symbols, and icons have been reincarnated in a number of

mediums.

The evolution of emoticons qualified by the school of communication historiography—

evidence that depicts the history, current studies on usage, and the emoticon-alphabetic

interchange—does not suggest that we are in a post-text and/or a hieroglyphic world—where

alphabetic writing is all but dead.

The Internet has become our shared memory—an entity that we turn to in order to recall

important things: "It is so much our servant that it would seem churlish to notice that it is also

our master" (Carr, 2010, p. 4). It is our hyper-extrasomatic memory, born of *supervening social*

necessity, realized and catalyzed via the broadcast seeding of "500 million tweets per day"

(Internet Live Stats, n.d., "Twitter Usage Statistics"); brains that read ten megabytes per day,

hear 400 megabytes per day, and see one megabyte of information every second (*The Economist*,

2006). The Internet, and therein especially Google (consider that Internet Live Stats reports:

"Google now processes over 40,000 search queries every second on average…which translates

to over 3.5 billion searches per day and 1.2 trillion searches per year worldwide" [n.d., "Google

Search Statistics"]), is where alphabetic writing is imperative—a place where inputting a series

of emoticons leads to algorithmic chaos and communication failure (Molli & Hubbard, 2016).

It is my deductive contention herein that the evidence suggests that a new digital

language may be afoot: a universal mixed shorthand of conventional written language,

exaggerated conventional punctuation and mechanics, cyber-speak acronyms (e.g., lol, etc.), and

emoticons; the existence and popularity of this shorthand language does not equate the death of

alphabetic writing or the spoken word; this hodgepodge shorthand intercedes on the alphabet and spoken word's behalf.

This intercession ought to be addressed as hyperbolic digital speak—or *hyper-digi-speak* (HDS), a label that more accurately depicts the shorthand medley that dominates the *digitalverse.*

Hyper

- Hyperbolic in time/place—its very currency: the "Information Revolution" and/or "Digital Age."

- Hyper vigilant in its anticipation of emotional reception/reaction.

- Hyper rendering of punctuation (superfluous punctuation) and mechanics (all-cap writing as yelling, etc).

- Hyper in that it conflates four types of communication: alphabetic writing; excessive punctuation/mechanics (to render emotion in the absence of speech, gesticulation, tone, facial expression); cyberspeak (acronyms); emoticons (pictures/icons/emoji/smileys).

Digi (An emerging and popular prefix for digital)

- This shorthand is limited to and was born of the *digitalverse.*

Speak

- It is a "talk," a language that attempts to act as a stand-in for written language, punctuation, cyberspeak, and emotion.

Discussion

It is impossible to tell the future, but it is intriguing and appropriate to speculate on how what we know now helps us imagine the possibilities. Author, renowned futurist, and organizational, technology, and social issue expert Marina Gorbis agrees. In examining the nature of the future and how technology is altering nearly every facet of our lives, Gorbis tells us that

> When it comes to big social and economic shifts, no one can predict the future; the level of complexity is just too great. Scenarios let us construct plausible, internally consistent visions that help us frame the range of possibilities and the kinds of issues we are likely to confront along the way. (Gorbis, 2013, pp. 174-175)

In the case of the emoticon, many questions—that warrant scholarly investigation—linger: Is our very *idea* of written language evolving (if/when emoticons migrate beyond digital communications)? Is the English language (among others) on the precipice of something entirely new? Is the Internet a massive peer-group that is developing its own language? Will we finally achieve one universal language via emoticons?

The Hwang and Matsumoto research in the context of Marshall McLuhan's predictions suggests that we need to examine emoticons as they are being used in multicultural environments (e.g., Facebook and digital periodical news forums) with the intercultural communications lens, if we are to learn more about the purported revival and ascension of a universal pictorial language independent from speech.

This research is bound to communications historiography and is limited to/by the narrative filament, the project mandate and context, and the timeframe in which it was drafted.

Whether empirical or epistemological, the study of emoticons, on a go forward basis,

rests on the following three key points:

1. Future scholarly investigations (studies and/or discourse) must resist/test the hyperbole and ahistoricism of technophilia, choosing instead to embrace the "anti-technicist polemic" (Winston, 2000, p. xiii).

2. Future studies/discourse must resist/test the popular culture mythos: "Myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system" (Barthes cited in Storey, 2006, p. 95).

3. Future studies/discourse must recognize the "polysemic nature of all signs; that is, their potential for multiple signification" (Storey, 2006, p. 96).

With the idea of *hyper-digi-speak* tabled and these three points in mind, I propose the greatest scholarly vantage point would be a semiological study of *hyper-digi speak*; it is through semiology that the *parole* (what is said) and the *langue* (the social contract/agreement) of *hyper-digi-speak* can be documented—the *lexis* understood beyond confounding presuppositions: Emoticons are not new, nor did Scott Fahlman invent them; moreover, emoticons are not sovereign, self-reliant agents in communication; they are profoundly complicated signs, symbols, and artifacts in a constant state of flux; they have standardized meanings that are openly ignored (tantamount to defying the dictionary); their denotations and connotations are dissonant, blurred, and ethereal—even when we insist they are not.

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Appendix A

Typographical Art: "Studies in Passions and Emotions" (*Puck Magazine*, March 30, 1881, p. 65)

PUCK.   65

able you to bring suit. They always give a man such facilities gladly."

"But say she refuses to marry?"

"There is no precedent for a woman refusing to marry, in the law."

At this point Mr. Ryan left to get his dinner, and Mr. Burke indicated to the jailer his desire to take a lease of his cell (with privilege of renewal) and to fit it up on the installment plan.

The next day Mr. Ryan made application at one of the higher courts for a mandamus compelling the jailer to show cause why he should not release Fortunatus.

"I am going," said Ryan, "to make this a TEST CASE."

Burke said he was sorry to hear it.

The jailer got five days to file answer, then an extension of twenty, two postponements of ten days each, and three privileges to "amend" his reply, with three days along with each one. Meanwhile Mr. Burke languished in jail. Ryan came to see him, spoke hopefully, and said:

"We must move slowly but surely. I will make the jailer pay the costs. This is some satisfaction."

At the end of seven weeks the jailer filed his answer, which was:

"Demurrer to the complaint, as it is defective. Redress in equity is a suit against committing magistrate. I am only his agent."

Mr. Burke was cast for $413.75 costs.

Mr. Ryan, however, continued to make it a "test case." He carried it from one court to another; he took it from the general term to the special term; he wrote and filed 320 pages of manuscript; he furnished bonds to the amount of $20,000, the arts of a Choate in law, a Fox in eloquence, and a Macchiavelli in strategy, he employed unstintingly. At the end of a year and a half he got the case to the Court of Appeals, in Albany, and it was put "peremptorily" on the calendar for June 16th, 1886. With this cheering information he returned to poor Burke, who still languished in jail.

"Well," said B., "what has all this thing cost?"

"Nothing! I brought it *in forma pauperis*. Constructively, you are a tramp. That will appear on the record if you are discharged."

"If?" said Burke. "Is it not all settled?"

"A decision," said Ryan, will be handed down from the Bench in Albany within five years."

Mr. Burke said nothing. He arose from his bench, took off his coat, and inquired of Quirites what was the way he came in. Mr. Ryan told him.

"It is the shortest way for you out," said Fortunatus fiercely. "Jailer," he said, "take me before the judge."

Ryan retired discreetly, and Mr. Burke was led into court and placed before the bar.

His Honor.—"What do you want?"
Burke.—"I wish to plead guilty."
His Honor.—"Of what offense?"
Burke.—"Murder."
His Honor.—"Murder!"
Burke.—"Murder in the first degree."
His Honor.—"What is your defence?"
Burke.—"Insanity."

His Honor said:

"Burke, the point is well taken. A man charged with murder who pleads insanity is always acquitted. There is no use holding you. I discharge you. You are free."

Burke.—"Don't you want bail?"
His Honor.—"It is useless. There is not the faintest possibility of a murderer with such a defence being condemned. Why didn't you enter this plea before?"

Mr. Burke did not answer.

But he took from his pocket two crisp five dollar bills, and handed one to the judge and one to his clerk.

"Ryan," he said, "has my bank-book and jewelry. The jailer has my life insurance policy. I leave the court a poor but a free man."

* * *

The feminine character is everything that is true, loyal, loving, noble and sincere. The woman waited. They were married. Children blessed their union, and now play sometimes with the gun which is waiting for Ryan in the hall. But the lawyer's clerk has moved to Ohio, and has the people of the United States for a client just now. Mr. Burke says that the day that case is called up for trial in the Court of Appeals, he will send Clerk Perrin a card of which this is a copy:

Mr. and Mrs. Fortunatus Burke,

(And don't you forget it.)

ERNEST HARVIER.

TYPOGRAPHICAL ART.

We wish it to be distinctly understood that the letterpress department of this paper is not going to be trampled on by any tyranical crowd of artists in existence. We mean to let the public see that we can lay out, in our own typographical line, all the cartoonists that ever walked. For fear of startling the public we will give only a small specimen of the artistic achievements within our grasp, by way of a first instalment. The following are from Studies in Passions and Emotions. No copyright.
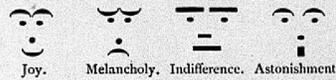
Joy.   Melancholy.   Indifference.   Astonishment.

A NUISANCE AND ITS REMEDY.

THE HOLY KISS.

THE MANLY KICK.

END OF THE WORLD.

"Say, what is there in this talk about Old Mother what-you-call-her, the conjugation of the planets, and the world comin' to an end this year?" asked a grizzled old '49er, stopping Prof. Legate as he was turning the corner of G and Union streets with a big telescope under his left arm. "Do you think the old world is going to pass in her checks?"

"Well," said the Professor, "we certainly have had, during the last year, some remarkable movements in the principal planets."

"Anything liable to bust loose very soon?"

"Before long. Let me see—at 9 o'clock on the night of April 21, Saturn will be in conjunction with the sun."

"Good for a starter. What next?"

"At 7 o'clock next morning Saturn and Jupiter will be in conjunction."

"Bully! That's business."

"At 9 o'clock that morning Jupiter will come into conjunction with the sun."

"Hurrah! All getting in their work on the sun. I can see old Sol beginning to get shaky on his pins. What next?"

"On the second of May Venus comes into conjunction with the sun."

"Glory! The old gal gets in her lick on the sun, too. It's gettin' hot now. Hit him again, old gal!"

"On the 11th of May Neptune will be in conjunction with the sun."

"Tiptop; old Nep and all of 'em goin' square at the sun, like so many butting billy goats. I'll live to see it yet. Who goes at him next?"

"On the 14th of May Mercury comes into conjunction with the sun, and Uranus will be at right angles."

"My what will be at right angles?"

"Uranus."

"The h—ll! Then I'll be in the grand bust up, sure. Is that all?"

"Those will be the principal occurrences."
—*Virginia (Nev.) Enterprise.*

"Is the Oilymargarine all out?" asked farmer Traddles of his wife at the breakfast table the other morning. "Yes," replied the good woman; "John, the hired man, took the last lump yesterday to grease the axles of the cart." "Well, John is getting altogether too economical," petulantly exclaimed Mr. Traddles. "He thinks common tar is too good for axle grease."—*Norristown Herald.*

NEW HAVEN people will remember the big whale that passed through this city on a couple of flat cars a few weeks ago. Well, it is on exhibition in Cincinnati, and one of the wicked papers of that city suggests that some one take the character of Jonah and give a Sunday-school entertainment.—*New Haven Register.*

PRESIDENT CHASE, of Haverford College, says the Bible has 120,000 errors which the new revision will make straight. Considering how our forefathers were handicapped, it is a wonder how any of them figured out their eternal peace.—*Somerville Journal.*

THE Parisian Jardin Mabille is to be closed. We were going over to Paris in company with three deacons to study the art works in the Louvre, but we have given up the idea.—*Boston Post.*